import of crude oil was 34.494 MMT and 39.808 MMT during 1997-98 and 1998-99 respectively. The import of crude oil is likely to be 63.94 MMT as against the requirement of 91.44 MMT during 1999-2000.

(b) The value of crude oil and petroleum products imported during last three years has been as under:—

(Rs. crores)

1996-97	34171.68
1997-98	28329.07
1998-99	24712.98*

*Provisional

(c) Refining sector has been de-licensed. India has become near self-sufficient in refining capacity. The import of petroleum products has decreased substantially. The Government had decided in November, 1997 that subsidy on Liquid Petroleum Gas (Domestic) and Kerosene (Public Distribution System) will be reduced in phases to reach the level of 15% and 33.33% of the import parity price by 2000-01 and 2001-02 respectively. The subsidy wil be transferred to the fiscal budget from the year 2002 onwards. The ex-storage point price of high speed diesel is now being fixed on import parity basis.

Grant of Soft Loan to BLFC Ltd.

863. SHRI JIBON ROY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Balmer Lawrie Freight Containers Ltd. (BLFC), a subsidiary of Balmer Lawrie and Co. Ltd., has reported itself to be potentially sick;

(b) if so, the measures taken by Government to nurse the Company back to normal; and

(c) what is Government's response to the request of the Company for grant of Rs. 45 crore soft loan by the Oil Industries Development Board?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) to (c) Balmer Lawrie Freight Containers Ltd. (BLFC) is not a subsidiary of Balmer Lawrie & Company Ltd. (BL). It is a joint venture promoted by BL with 49% share holding. 51% shares are held by institutional investors and public. The company has reported itself to be potentially sick under Section 23 of Industrial Disputes Act.

The proposal of the company for the grant of Rs. 45 crores soft loan is still with Oil Industries Development Board (OIDB) for their consideration.

Tax benefits to oil refineries

. 864. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of PETROELUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that certain tax benefits are being extended to Numaligarh Refinery Ltd.

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether similar benefits will be extended to Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals and the other two refineries of IOC;

(d) if so, the proposed time frame; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI E. PONNUSWAMY): (a) and (b) The benefit of exemption from excise duty available to goods cleared from units located in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura has also been extended to Numaligarh Refinery with effect from 9th February, 2000.

(c) to (e) The exemption from excise duty under notification Nos. 32 and 33/99 both dated 8th July, 1999 is available only to units that were either set up or have undertaken substantial expansion on or after 24.12.97. Bongaigaon Refinery had completed its substantial expansion prior to this date. Hence, there is no proposal to extend